SEPTMBER 22, 1987

COPY

Judith
→ Send to Mike Lennon,

Mike — this is fabulously
garbled by whoever
transcribed it — and
I'm probably guilty too
but I send it to you for
your sense of
complete
despair
on interviews

NORMAN MAILER

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(more of interviews)

YOU ARE RANKED AS ONE OF THE GREAT WRITERS IN THE WORLD AND I SAY THAT WITH RESPECT AND ADMIRATION EVEN THOUGH I DON'T ALWAYS UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU WRITE.
(Laughter) It helps me a great deal if you don't (Laughter).

NOW, AS A DIRECTOR AND WRITER AND BEING IN FILMS SO MUCH HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR PRESENT POSITION? DO YOU THINK YOU ARE GOING TO GO AFTER THAT SAME LEVEL OF ATTAINMENT YOU HAVE IN YOUR WRITING?
I think it may be too late, you know. I think if I had become a film director twenty years ago then I might have had high ambition. I feel stirrings. You know, I'd love to make a great movie of that truly great monumental work in film but I also think that you have to be, of necessity, you have to be modest because it probably takes twenty to thirty years to become a complete film director, to know the front of the camera and the back. I mean, if you come in as late as I do, I think you have to depend, to a great extent, upon your technicians. Obviously, I will never begin to know as much about cinematography as the good and great cinematographers I would get in making films so if I have anything to bring to film directing, it's probably that I've spend a lot of time with actors one way or another and I've been in Actors' Studio for thirty years as a playwright off and on and -- and I think I can work with actors. You know, you can't be a director without having some confidence and my competence is that I can get interesting performances out of actors but when it comes to the other side of film which is actually equally important, I would -- it would take me -- I would think it would take me ten years anyway to begin to really make a visual contribution of any real sort.

DO YOU THINK THIS MONUMENTAL WORK WILL COME OUT OF YOUR OWN WORK? WHETHER YOU WOULD CHOOSE TO MAKE?
Possibly. I've no idea. Listen, I may never make another film if this film doesn't do well. You know, they're not going to come and lift me up and put me in a director's chair again (Laughter).

YOU MENTIONED TWENTY YEARS AGO. YOU DID THREE FILMS TWENTY YEARS AGO?
Yes.

WHAT MADE YOU STOP? IF YOU WANTED TO BE A DIRECTOR, WHY DIDN'T YOU CONTINUE?
Well, I put all my own money into those films and they were underground films and I had a theory about how films should be made and this theory crashed so I was unhappy about it. I thought my films would make enough money so I could make more films that way. It didn't happen at all and at that point I thought well, I've got to think about what I've done and -- and in the meantime I was in debt because I'm fond of saying that I, with all the money I spent on my own films, I should have gone out and bought a yacht (Laughter) and -- and sunk it (Laughter) because that's what happened. I was -- I -- making those three

movies put me in debt in about 1972 and I've been in debt ever since so they really and, of course, no-one invited me to make a film and -- and I -- life caught me up you might say and also I can't pretend I was miserable writing books. I -- I, you know, I enjoyed to a degree writing books. It's just that it's less fun than making a movie, there's no questions.

ANOTHER QUESTION WHICH CAME TO MIND IF THEY CAME TO YOU AND SAID WE WANT TO TAKE THIS NOVEL AND MAKE IT INTO A FILM BUT WITH ANOTHER DIRECTOR, WOULD YOU GIVE THE APPROVAL TO DO IT?
I have nine children and I would probably give them approval (Laughter). They haven't all gone through school yet.

I WOULD LIKE TO ASK A COUPLE OF QUESTIONS ABOUT TWO ELEMENTS IN THIS FILM THAT INTRIGUED ME. ONE WAS THE MYSTICISM THAT YOU BROUGHT INTO THIS STORY WHERE THERE ARE TWO WHORES THAT HAVE BEEN KILLED. THEY TALK ABOUT PROVINCETOWN BEING THE FIRST PLACE THAT...
The Pilgrims landed.

THAT THE PILGRIMS LANDED AND AT THE END YOU HEAR THIS DISEMBODIED LAUGH. YOU DID NOT EXPLORE THAT MORE INTO THE STORY BUT ARE YOU SAYING THAT THESE CHARACTERS WERE REALLY POSSESSED OR THAT THEY REALLY -- THERE WERE SOME OTHER FORCES THAT WERE GUIDING THEIR ACTIONS OR WHAT WERE YOU SAYING THERE?
Well, I had a theory -- I have a theory in life that may not work in movies and my theory is that most people have experiences of the occult or the sinister but they don't have them dramatically. They have them subtly and I wanted to try that in this film. In other words, I didn't want to dramatize the two dead whores. In the original script I had their voices going all through the movie and the more I thought about it the more I thought it's too heavy an effect. What I want to get is a slightly sinister effect of these whores that perhaps they're there, perhaps they're not, you know, the -- as we -- when we begin to be -- after all, not everybody is crazy but many many people are a little bit crazy, just a little bit (Laughter) and it's that little bit that I wanted in this film that -- that part that Ryan O'Neal plays, Tim Madden, that Tim Madden couldn't be certain of his sanity altogether and I thought that a minimal emphasis was one of the things I wanted in the movie. What I wanted the movie to be was many things at once so that it would recapture for me the feeling of what life is like when we're in terrible events which is when I think we're in terrible events the form with which we appreciate these terrible events that may even be put to these terrible events changes all the time so that we start off by saying I think I'm in a tragedy and a little later in the day, we say "No, no, no, it's a farce." (Inaudible) and then we say -- we wake up the next morning and we say "No, it's a drama." For instance, when a man breaks up with his wife that's usually what he goes through. He doesn't know if liberty awaits him or disaster and -- and I wanted this feeling of -- of the given changing all the time to permeate my film and at editing we worked for that. With the music we worked for that.

FARCE

ALSO, YOU KNOW THIS THEME HAS BEEN THROUGHOUT YOUR WORK. THERE IS ALWAYS AN ELEMENT OF THAT.
Yes.

SO I WANTED TO ASK YOU WHAT ARE YOUR BELIEFS REGARDING THAT? YOUR PERSONAL BELIEFS AND IF YOU HAVE ANY EXPERIENCES THAT REALLY LED YOU INTO THAT AREA?
I've had -- I've had a few slightly occult experiences which I'd rather not talk about because precisely because they're not all that dramatic. They're subtle. My feeling is that the occult is there, along with everything else. That is -- in other words, I don't believe that the occult determines existence but I think occasionally it has an effect. It's -- it's one more -- it's one element, if you will, in cosmic physics along with everything else and I don't see why that's not -- now that may not be a point of view you can put into a movie. Maybe in a movie if you heard the occult you've got to be occult with a great big trowel. You got to lay it on very heavily but I'd rather not. To me film is -- is subtle. A film is best when it's quietly subtly sinister. Not -- not heavily sinister. Maybe I'm wrong but we'll find out.

HOW DID IT HAPPEN THAT YOU CAME TO DIRECT AT THIS PARTICULAR POINT AND HOW CLOSE IS THE MOVIE TO THE BOOK?
Well, I was invited to do the movie by Menachem Golan who wanted me to do a script for Jean-Luc Godard for KING LEAR. Now, you know, Godard bears the same relation to scripts that a goat does to newspapers (Laughter). Yes. So I said my producer, Tom Luddy (sp?) called -- called me up with this offer and I said "Thanks a lot but no thanks" because to begin with if you adapt KING LEAR you're gonna be beaten to death by every Shakespearean in the world and on top of that doing it for Godard was not to my pleasure 'cos I -- if you write a script you have to have some hope it's gonna be -- appear on the screen but then Luddy said "Well, we'll be -- one of you could direct TOUGH GUYS DON'T DANCE as well 'cos I talked to him about that that I wanted to direct the book. I said, "In that case, Paris is worth a mass" and so we made it a two picture deal. Menachem Golan got on the phone and said "Mr. Mailer, I'm happy to agree with you on a two picture contract" and that was how it happened. I did write the script for KING LEAR, for a modern KING LEAR and as I expected, Godard used two words from it. The name I gave to the character, Don Learo (sp?) (Laughter). In fact, and then Godard and I -- I was supposed to act in the film and Godard and I got along -- we worked together for one day and we got along abominably. We had -- not we -- he had been coming to America three or four times on the Concorde to go to locations with me in America because that's where he was going to shoot the film but each time he'd come he'd say "I'm not in the mood to look at locations" and we'd sit around and sip coffee and look glumly at one another and then he finally decided he wanted to make the movie in Switzerland so I went over with my daughter and he had me playing someone named Norman Mailer (Laughter) and he was giving me my dialogue. Now, Godard speaks English poetically, but poorly, so he was giving me lines to say on the order of "Ah, now, at last I've done with my

work" (Laughter) and after this went on a little while, I said to him "I will say anything you want me to say if you will change my name but if I'm going to play someone named Norman Mailer, I must speak my own dialogue" so he -- he was very angry and by the end of the day it was obvious we weren't going to be working together much more and the next day we had a terrible fight at breakfast and it was such a tremendous fight that I turned to Godard because his cameramen were there and I said "either let us film this or let us go to another room and have the argument" but -- but (Laughter) it was really extraordinarily well worth filming and then we said goodbyes and we agreed to separate on the film and he went ahead and made it and I understand he used the scenes he shot of me, probably to my deep embarrassment (Laughter) but I have something wicked to say about Godard because I've thought about him a lot, as you can imagine, and I think he truly is possibly he's the greatest editor, film editor in the world. Getting film is a nuisance to him. In fact, he -- he's rather happy if the film isn't too good when he gets it because then he can show you his art as an editor and he can do wonderful things once he's got the film. Getting the film is -- is the trouble. You have to deal with actors, you have to deal with cameramen. It's just a nuisance so I think to make Jean-Luc Godard absolutely happy all we would have to do is find some surgeon who can perform an operation where a movie camera could be substituted for his penis (Laughter). At that point, Jean-Luc Godard could spend the rest of his life talking to himself and having endless material to be edited (Laughter).

ASSUMING THAT THERE'S NO PERFECTION, IF YOU WERE TO REDO THIS MOVIE WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE? HOW HAPPY ARE YOU WITH IT?
With the movie?

YES.
Well, I'm probably too happy with it (Laughter), you know, I'm a first director of a mainstream film and I'm, you know, I'm -- I'm acting like a proud parent handing out cigars. Oh, I find it's impossible to make a movie without having five or six moments that you wince at and that somehow they got through and how did you ever let that happen, how did you ever let this happen and -- but, essentially, I think the film is -- is what it is. I think it's -- it's interesting. I think if I were a young director, a lot of people would be saying "He's a very interesting young director. Maybe he'll become something." And the way it is now, you know, on balance I think it's -- I will be very surprised if it's not one of the ten most interesting films made this year in America. But that's not because it's that good. It's just because the other films are so bad (Laughter).

WE ALL WERE AT THE (INAUDIBLE) FOR THE MEDIA.
I -- I'm sorry.

THE POPE GAVE A PRESS CONFERENCE AND GAVE A SPEECH TO THE MEDIA.
Yes.

surgeon
happiness → Godard

AND DID YOU READ WHAT HE SAID?
Yes, more or less.

ANYWAY, WHAT DO YOU THINK THE POPE WOULD SAY TO YOUR PICTURE?
Well, publicly or privately? (Laughter)

PERSONALLY.
Publicly, he -- he would -- he would have to condemn it. It does not -- it's not at all in accordance with the principles that he gave to us but I have to tell you that I have a -- a deep respect for the Pope for the vainest reason in the world which is people are always coming up to me and saying "You know, you look just like the Pope" (Laughter) so I -- I love him (Laughter) but it has nothing to do with what he says. It's just -- he's such a handsome man (Laughter). He's mon semblable, mon frere. What do I think seriously of -- of what he's saying. I have -- I have a deep, with all due respect, I have a deep argument with what he is saying because I think that -- I'm talking about films now, not -- not the rest of the discussion of the media but I think when it comes to film, I think in a way people take it too seriously and too directly. That is, they -- they think if you make a movie that's violent, immediately and automatically it makes other people violent and my feeling is that it's a very rare movie that one sees and is never -- without being aware all the time that one's looking at a movie. There's an element of play in a movie and it may be that a lot of these movies of violence actually have -- have paradoxically have a mildly agreeable effect upon people because it brings them back to their childhood when they played violent games. You see it -- there may be something even what can I say -- restorative and cathartic in a violent film. Now, there are good violent films and bad ones. You know, there are abominable violent films that are merely bloody money machines and they are made cynically and they are made with an idea to just see -- to manipulate an audience and get a maximum effect and they're disgusting but then there are perfectly sweet, sentimental good films so-called like THE SOUND OF MUSIC that are also disgusting because they're too sentimental. You see, because they poison people in another way. Whenever one makes a film let's say either doing something good or something bad for the people who see it. One's either injuring them through putting false sentimental concepts in their mind or abusing them by manipulating them or one's enlarging them by, if I may say it, sweetening their unconscious because I think film goes right to the unconscious. You see, literature appeals to the mind. Literature appeals. Whenever we read a book, we read it in relation to all the other books we've read and ultimately a good book improves our sensibility, our -- our way of measuring and judging the nuances, everything that happens to us but films enter our dreams. If a film is -- is good enough, then even a bad film can do this. They get into the memory of our dreams, that place where memory and the dream live together is a perfect terrain for films to live in and there's something absolutely exceptional about the psychic effect that -- that dreams have on our imagination. See, so as I say, literature appeals to the mind; dreams to the imagination and, therefore,

violent films have a legitimate place in art if they're good because dreams are very violent. If that doesn't mean that -- if we have a violent dream, if we have a dream that we're gonna murder someone, that doesn't mean that we're a murderer or that we're gonna go out and injure someone and if we have a dream that we're gonna be killed, that doesn't mean that we're a suicide or that we're gonna be injured the next day and movies, I think, have that affect. They're like dreams in -- in that way so to go back to the Pope, I would think that if one had an art that was completely healthy, one thing you could count on, you will have art that was completely unhealthy. I think the Soviet Union after fifty years of travelling down the wrong road is perhaps beginning to recognize this. You -- enough said.

MARIANNE WANTED US TO ALL GO HOME SO SHE CAN HAVE A PRIVATE INTERVIEW WITH YOU SO I THINK WE SHOULD GIVE HER THE PRIVILEGE.

I FIND YOU MUCH MORE ATTRACTIVE THAN THE POPE. (Laughter).

IN HOLLYWOOD THE SCREENWRITERS DON'T UNDERSTAND PICTURES. MAYBE YOU COULD TALK ABOUT SCREENWRITING AS OPPOSED TO WRITING A NOVEL? Well, screenwriting is really I think bears much more relation to poetry than it does to novel writing by which I do not mean that screenwriting is the least bit poetic but in poetry finally what's involved is you put one line after another line and prose is a continuous river of thought but in poetry you have montage. You have one line and then another line and then another line and when you're doing a screenplay montage, of course, is -- is everything. You are creating a machine, an aesthetic machine on which the work can be laid. Christopher Walken, the actor, once said that a screenplay was really like a plumber's manual. It -- it showed you how to do the job when it was up to the actors and everyone else to achieve that job and flesh it out. In other words, a screenplay is -- is a form which is interesting precisely because it's so exigent because it demands so much and gives so little back. It's probable that a really good screenplay should not be all that agreeable to read. If it's too agreeable to read, then maybe there's something wrong with it that -- I remember George Stevens once said over thirty years ago, forty years ago almost, was talking to me and -- and George Stevens, the director, and he said that -- that he didn't like the treatment that read too well because it made him nervous. He'd say to himself how do I get that on the screen? He -- he wanted the bare bones and a screenplay, in that sense, is a skeleton. Thank you for comparing me favorably to the Pope (Laughter).

IS IT DIFFICULT TO LIVE UP TO THE LEGEND NORMAN MAILER? No, it's easy because the legend is so wrong that it gives me a great advantage over people. They come expecting one thing and they always get another so I always am ahead for the first five minutes (Laughter).

YOU HAVE HAD A NUMBER OF WIVES AND MANY CHILDREN.
Nine.

NINE.
Like a good Italian.

HOW IS YOUR WAY OF BEING A FATHER CHANGED THROUGH THE YEARS? ARE YOU LEARNING ON THE JOB?
(Laughter) There's a wonderful story about -- about a Texan in New York who doesn't know what to do with himself on a Sunday evening so he buys two tickets for a Van Cliburn concert. Van Cliburn is a fellow Texan and then he wanders around New York all day and in the evening as the concert's approaching he's down on the lower east side and he goes up to an old lady who's wearing a babushka and he says to her "Excuse me, ma'am, but how do you get to Carnegie Hall from here?" and the lady says "Oh," she says, "You must practise and practise (Laughter)." I am -- I am that kind of husband (Laughter).

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN THE TARGET FOR FEMINISTS?
Yes.

NOW WE ARE IN THE LATE EIGHTIES. HAVE ANY OF YOUR GIRLFRIENDS OR HUSBANDS...
Husbands (Laughter).

ACCUSED YOU OF BEING A MALE CHAUVINIST PIG? HOW HAVE THINGS CHANGED NOW THAT YOU ARE ...
Well, I -- I think the new generation of -- of women that is the ones who are just getting out of college, I think they've absorbed the victories of feminism. There's no question feminism had, you know, made great strides in at least in America and I think they're much more casual about it. You know, they take it as their right and they're not militant the way the -- the older feminists were and are. The older feminists are fascinating to me because they're -- they're like an emigre group. They haven't had a new idea in twenty years. The girls -- by girls I mean the young women under twenty-five or under thirty are pretty lively and pretty spirited and so I don't sneer at feminism. I think it's had some very good results among many women but as is often the sad truth, the people who start the revolution, you know, are used up by it and end up rather dull sorts. Like Gloria Steinem, you know, who ...

HOW ARE YOU IN LIFE? HOW HAVE YOU BEEN?
Oh, I'm so good a husband you wouldn't believe it (Laughter). I even make my own breakfast.

WELL, THIS LEADS TO CERTAIN NECESSARY QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE CULTURAL UNDERGROUND, IF THERE IS ANY IN AMERICA TODAY?
There's much less than there used to be. It -- we used to have a real underground here, a counter-culture and a -- another way, an -- they used to talk about an alternative way of life. Ronald Reagan has done harm to this country that's beyond measure. I

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mean, we're gonna find out thirty years from now some of the things he's done to this country. I am fond these days of calling him Marie Antoinette because when -- not because I'm impuning his sexuality (Laughter). No, I know nothing about his sexuality. It might be superb, for all I know, but I call him Marie Antoinette because when problems are presented to him, he says "Well, let them have cake." You know, he has essentially the same relation to reality that Marie Antoinette had which is -- which is you etc. so the culture today is -- is a yuppie culture. That means that there are only two things that the average young American cares about: money and acumen and acumen is -- is tremendously important to Americans these days. They can't bear a situation that they cannot name which is -- and if you come down to it, probably if Americans had to choose between the yuppies had to choose between money and acumen, they'd rather be medium wealthy and respected for their acumen than be enormously wealthy and have mediocre acumen. That's how important acumen is to them and that's why ultimately they are prodigiously silly. They are prodigiously silly at a very high level because the one thing we cannot do in life is keep naming everything that happens as it happens. I mean, that's an old French disease and -- and with apologies to those of you who are French but that is an old French disease that you name experience before one's experienced it and now America's caught that French disease.

SO WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE DIRECTION OF THE CULTURE AND POLITICS IN THIS COUNTRY?
Well, I think -- I don't think there's a direction. I don't think it's as if ten of us can get together and issue a manifesto. I think that if you want my amateur opinion of what's going to happen, I think America's facing some very serious economic problems in years to come and that if there's a serious depression here it's gonna be a terrible time because I think the country, in my gloomiest moments, I think the country is a pre-totalitarian state. The way you could speak of certain people being in a pre-cancerous state. There's, for instance, there are no ideas left in the country that people are willing to die for except for a few right-wing patriots who are always waging the wrong war with the wrong understanding of it and on the left there's just nothing left except a lot of spoiled people all making their demands for their particular group with no picture of the whole so I'm gloomy. I'm gloomy about what can happen here. Oh, let me just finish what I -- but if something comes out of all this, you know, if there are terrible times ahead, then there'll be new ideas so that I can't begin to conceive of and maybe some of them will be interesting but...

I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW IF YOU ARE INVOLVED NOW WITH ANY GROUPS OF PEOPLE OR ANY MOVEMENTS OF IDEAS?
No, I -- no, no. No, I'm -- I'm the leader of a gang of one (Laughter).

COULD YOU TELL US DID YOU PICK UP "TOUGH GUYS CAN'T DANCE" BECAUSE YOU BELIEVE I READ SOMEWHERE THAT VERY GOOD NOVELS DON'T MAKE GOOD MOVIES AND IT IS EASIER TO MAKE GOOD MOVIES FROM A NOT SO GOOD NOVEL.

I believe that.

THAT WRITING AND ALSO I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU, EVERYBODY CLAIMS RATIONAL BEHAVIOR AND THROUGH THE WHOLE MOVIE THERE IS NOTHING RATIONAL. THIS IS THE ONLY TIME WHEN WE SAW ONE COP.

You only saw one cop?

ONE COP. IN THE WHOLE MOVIE WE SEE ONE COP.

One cop, yes. Well, actually, there's one scene where there are three or four cops. Let me answer your first question first. I do believe that the best -- that not always the best movies but usually it's -- it's much easier to make a very good movie from a bad book than a good book and to the degree my movie is not as good as it should be, it's because the book is too good but the -- but in answer to that question, yes, in my movie there's only one cop. There are a couple of places where you actually, if you look carefully, you can see a few other cops in the background but very little of that and the reason is I'm tired of movies where we go into a police station we have 18 people at the typewriter and two people talking on walkie-talkies and we have all the paraphernalia of 20th century life which we see on television every night and I thought of something that Andre Gide once said which -- about writing. He said only write about the things that no-one else writes about and I thought that in a realistic, so-called realistic movie about police and drug dealers and all that, put in only the scenes that have not been on television ever. Do all the things that have not been done which is why the movie has that feverish, nightmarish, exaggerated quality. I just simply didn't want to get into all that stuff which I think is unbelievably dull. I figured the audience could use their imagination and put other police in other parts. You remember the movie that Spalding Gray made SWIMMING TO CAMBODIA. Did you see that? A remarkable film. It's a remarkable film because as he talks, he just talks the way I'm talking now, and tells these stories. As he does, you see this -- this giant movie behind him in some imaginary way that's a fabulous movie that he creates for us and I thought stemming that principle of you can make a movie where -- where there's only one policeman but the audience without thinking will have all the other policemen in place at their typewriters.

AND ALSO YOU CAN TELL US YOU WROTE ABOUT TWENTY BOOKS AND WHY DID IT TAKE YOU SO LONG TO WRITE (INAUDIBLE). IT TOOK YOU ELEVEN YEARS OR SOMETHING TO WRITE THAT.

Well, I -- the Egyptian belief in the hereafter was close to mine and I've always believed that our soul is not necessarily immortal. That our soul can be immortal, can be immortal but it can also perish before we do. For me that's always been an explanation for a lot of irrational behavior. Sometimes when people are doing incredibly stupid things because they're trying to save their soul and the hell with their body. You know, people who drink themselves to death, for instance, what have you, so I was fascinated with the Egyptian idea that when you die your soul may or may not reach the Elysian Fields and/or can perish in the underworld of -- of death and that idea was of such importance to me and so exciting that I ended up -- I just start with the idea I was to spend eleven years and if that book is not a great book, it's the biggest mistake of my life to have spent eleven years on it but, nonetheless, and it may not be a great book but, nonetheless, I mean, so few people have read it that no-one can tell yet whether it's a great book. It's like the continent of America. It just out there. I mean, I don't think one responsible literary person in a hundred has read that book but you, you know, but anyway it -- it kept me involved and another reason I took eleven years is that I was writing other books to support myself and another reason is it's the research is so difficult. The books you have to read are so boring that it takes a long time to read them and absorb them and so forth. I could have made fifteen movies in those eleven years.

TALKING ABOUT THE CULTURE AND WHERE IT'S GOING, HAVE YOU READ ANY OF THE NEW CELEBRATED WRITERS LIKE TAMAR JANOWICZ OR ELLIS OR MACHINELLI (SP?) OR BEN ?
You know I -- I've glanced -- I've glanced at them and they -- they seem -- I looked at them too superficially to give any judgment. I -- I find that what I tend to do is read the new writers five years after they come out because the ones who are really good emerge and you save yourself an awful lot of time because when I read a book, I don't just read a book. I get angry if the book is over-rated or I get angry if the book has not been appreciated sufficiently and then I get guilty because if the book is going to be appreciated sufficiently, then maybe I should write something in defense of it and I don't do it so it's one more thing that's nagging at me on my desk and so forth so to keep my life simple I read very little to my cerebral malnutrition and ...

BUT YOU DON'T SEE THEM AS HOPES OR ...
I haven't read enough of them to say. My guess is, if you want an ignorant answer, my guess is that they're probably not that important in the scheme of things because the novel seems to be becoming more and more oppressed by the shape of the culture. There's less and less interest in good writing. My generation came along and we were smaller than Hemingway and Faulkner and now that generation's come along and they were smaller than we are, were and the people are just not interested in America any longer in -- in writers as major figures so I think it's a tough generation for them, you know, to write at this time now is not as easy as it was when I was a writer starting.

ANOTHER QUESTION IS YOUR FASCINATION WITH MARILYN. IS THAT BEHIND YOU NOW? DO YOU STILL THINK ABOUT IT AND WAS IT ALSO ONE OF YOUR DAUGHTERS PLAYED MARILYN IN A PLAY THAT YOU DID?
Yes.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED WITH THAT PROJECT AND HOW ARE YOU WITH MARILYN?
Well, I'd like to put it on again. We were going to do it off-Broadway because the play was fairly well received in workshop and then my daughter injured her knee skiing. Leave it to a young actress to do that and then I had to do other work and I don't know when we'll get back to it because I have to take three months of my life and put it aside if I'm going to direct it and I have to take six weeks of my life and put it aside if someone else is going to direct it so I don't know when we'll do it but I'd like to do it because my daughter, I thought, was wonderful in it and it's -- it's -- it was a new experience for me to be that delighted with the talents of my children so well hopefully in the next year or two I'll do it.

I WONDER IF YOU COULD COMPARE SOME OF THE JOYS AND MISERIES OF DIRECTING VERSUS WRITING?
Writing is full of pleasure when you think of a new book and you are excited by and you're taking notes every day and reading and getting ready and psyching yourself up and writing is marvellous if you've done a good piece of work and you're done with it and you're going through the galleys and tuning it and everything inbetween is awful. You know, they speak of a literary muse. When I think of a literary muse, I don't see her as a young goddess who's beautiful. I see her as a very grim, accusing woman, lives out in Kansas in the flattest part of Kansas (Laughter) and on land that's as white as a page and she's always scolding me. She has no use for me. She -- she says you're -- been delinquent in your husbandly duties again. You haven't been here for two days. You haven't worked. You're not responsible and -- and it's awful writing a book, just awful. As you delve, you get the worst it is because you -- you have to adjust, you know, if you write a book you have to be able to justify yourself. A writer plays God. A movie director only plays general (Laughter) but a writer plays God over a little world and he -- it's -- it's not automatic to play God. You have to find a reason that you can justify this so you -- you sit there and you go through your -- your dull sins. You know, all the stupid things you said yesterday which you've got to get rid of before you can start writing because God does not say dull, stupid things and it takes an hour. Every writer talks about how long it takes them to start and every day you go through that and you squeeze your liver and your guts to get out a few words and you go on and you say -- I've found over the years the only way to write a book is to stay in a mild depression because if I'm in too good a mood the words seem to have too much life. You know, I write "I love you," she said and I'm so excited as if I've done something wonderful (Laughter) so a dull depression is -- is -- is the state you have to be in and your wife suffers, your children suffer. It's terrible. Being a movie director, you're the centre of everything. People, whether they respect you or not, they act as if they respect you because it's a military business, you know. You say to someone I like that chair, move it over there. They say yes, sir. It's extraordinary. I always wanted to be a general and finally I was a general and no-one was getting killed either. It's a -- so some critics have said that

that was exactly what was wrong with my movie, that I didn't take it seriously enough, that I didn't suffer enough but I must tell you, after forty years of writing, it was very hard to suffer making my first movie. Maybe making my second movie, my third movie, my fourth movie, thinking of what the critics will say will keep me sufficiently serious so I will never enjoy myself again making a movie but (Laughter) but up to now the differences have been enormous.

CAN YOU MENTION SOME DIRECTORS AND FILMS THAT YOU LIKED?
Well, let's start with the directors 'cos the films we get too long a list but, well, Bergman and Fellini. In America and Bunuel. In America Coppola. I mean, I think APOCALYPSE NOW was absolutely extraordinary work. Some of the older directors: Billy Wilder, John Huston, I don't know, it -- it always makes me nervous because I always think of the two or three who are looming in my mind at the moment who I've failed to mention and I'll pick up ten minutes later but...

WELL, I AM GLAD YOU SAID BERGMAN FIRST BECAUSE I'M SWEDISH.
Oh, first, absolute.

THE MOVIE WAS SHOT IN YOUR HOUSE.
Yes.

WHAT WENT ON ON THE SET, YOU KNOW, WHILE YOU WERE FILMING WITH RYAN O'NEAL, ISABELLA AND THE OTHER ACTORS?
Well, my relation with Ryan was -- I knew Ryan better than the other actors because years ago -- about five years ago, I was still doing some boxing and we had a little club and Ryan used to come when he was in New York. He'd come over to this club and he'd box four or five of us because Ryan is a very good boxer. He could probably could have been a professional and he was in excellent shape and so we'd each box a round or two with him of three minutes and then he'd box seven or eight rounds in the course of the day while making a movie, mind you, and he had a very interesting cruel side, a dark side, together with his great charm. He is a very charming man and I thought he'd be perfect for Tim Madden because, first of all, I thought he was a very good actor. I liked him very much in BARRY LYNDON. Kubrick's another director that should be mentioned and so I thought he would keep the centre of my film alive because I knew I had a screenplay that involved a man who's full of hangovers and regrets and a certain sickness of spirit because of all that's happened and people are impinging on him at a great rate. People who are more colorful than himself and -- and I thought if I have an actor at the centre of it who's a very good actor but not terribly charming, the picture will be absolutely dead at the core so I wanted Ryan who had a lively centre for the film. Isabella was a gift. I saw BLUE VELVET and I thought that is about the bravest performance I've seen in a long long time. I thought that girl has such wonderful guts and Tom Luddy knew her slightly and called her and offered her the role and she accepted and I rewrote the role for her because the girl in the book was Italian-American and in the movie we made her Italian. There's a

gulf in accent between Italian women and Italian-American women and they're very different so we had to rewrite the role. The actress who played Patty Laraine came to us through auditions. She just won it. She won the role. Yeah, absolutely I thought and -- and it was an enormously difficult role. She was a young -- she's a young, confident actress who's marvellous to work with. She's going to be a director's joy in years to come because she's always prepared and never gives trouble. She's extraordinary. Frances Fisher, who played Jessica, came from Actors' Studio and just was wonderful in auditions. The men came to us through auditions -- the other men. I think, with the exception of Ryan and Isabella, the others were all -- all won the part. Working with them was -- Ryan is very bright, very difficult to work with. In fact, I think he's not very difficult to work with. He's very difficult to win a verbal contest with him which is my idea of very difficult to work with (Laughter). He's wittier than I am in quick engagements. In fact, the -- we had about twenty set-to's on the set and he won 19 of them which made the crew happy. The only one I won was one day I made a mistake with him. He was speaking a little too quietly and I said "Ryan, would you up it a little" and I made the mistake of doing this in front of the crew which he hates and I'd forgotten or think I forgot. Maybe I was doing it purposely. I don't know. At any rate, he said "put in your hearing aid" (Laughter) so I said "I'll tell you what. I'll put on my glasses as well" and -- but I had to make that much fun of myself in order to win a contest with him so ...

YOU TALKED ABOUT THE RELATION BETWEEN NOVELS AND MOVIES AGAIN AND THE PART THAT YOU SAID GREAT NOVELS NEVER BECOME GREAT MOVIES BUT LESSER NOVELS CAN BECOME VERY GOOD MOVIES. IT IS VERY CURIOUS. CAN YOU GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE? CAN YOU BE A LITTLE MORE PRECISE?
Oh, yes, THE ASPHALT JUNGLE which was a perfectly nice, mediocre novel and there's a wonderful movie. I think there are many more. THE MALTESE FALCON is -- is really a very good novel but the movie is far better. It probably is the exception to my rule but -- but it's a very simple novel. Perhaps it isn't that it's a bad novel, it's just that bad novels tend to be very simple because after all if you're writing a novel why be simple. There are so many better ways to be simple but -- but a novel after all I like novels that are full of intellection, that present the author's sensibility and literary sensibility is -- is about the most difficult single thing to pass over into a film. You know, REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST will simply not be made into a -- into a great movie, in my opinion.

AND THE SECOND QUESTION, YOU SAID VERY OFTEN THAT THIS IS A DEPRESSING TIME BECAUSE OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION AND THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION. DO YOU THINK THAT FEELINGS CAN CHANGE IN A POSITIVE WAY AFTER THE REAGAN ERA OR WE HAVE TO FACE A DARK FUTURE?
Well, you know, I think there are small swings in the pendelum and huge swings to the pendelum and I've got pessimistic about everything forever but I think that the next ten or twenty years in America we've done some awful things in the last forty years.

Stupid things. We've had a major cold war with a huge poor country, the Soviet Union, that's -- and then -- that has a standard of living that compares to third world countries and we have kept that country poor by insisting on this cold war. I mean, we have pretended that they were a huge threat to our existence, which is nonsense, and the course of it we will end by impoverishing ourselves. America passed from being the most powerful country in the world to a country that is now fighting for equality with a couple of countries that are coming up very quickly -- Japan and Germany for two. So there's that -- that we've in a sense thrown away our economic power for a scenario which is that communism is a virus which will attack everything unless powerfully resisted at every moment and in my opinion it's a joke because finally, in my opinion, communism can never attain world power because it's essentially cannabilistic and cannabilistic in that if you have the entire world with communists then it will neatly be divided into democratic communist countries and totalitarian communist countries will be fighting one another. Communism is not monolithic. It's -- it's sectarian so in that sense the scenario's absurd and in addition to that, we have defaced the American landscape. We destroyed the American roots. The average American cannot go back to the place where they were born. They can't find that house in which they were born or even the hospital in which they were born because it's been replaced and America's created the dullest architecture in the history of Christendom (Laughter). You know, we have immense faceless buildings and these -- this produces a tremendous depression on the human spirit because if you walk down the street and you see these huge buildings that are dull and faceless, they stink of corporate power which, to my mind, is absolutely as boring and oppressive and monumentally totalitarian in the spiritual sense as communism and, in fact, our greatest achievement in the battle with communism is that we've succeeded in making the outskirts of Moscow look as ugly as any other -- the outskirts of any other major city in the world so with all this, you know, what happens to all these people who grow up with these terrible buildings? You know, it's like animals growing up in sanitary cages rather than in the woods. What kind of animals are you gonna have after fifty years of that so I'm, you know, I think the short-term prognosis is -- is depressive. However, I think there may come a time when they take those buildings and they fill them with concrete and they use them as piers on which to build wonderfully elaborate lacey-like buildings that are 300 stories high and look like trees and that will be exceptional because that's a hundred years -- that's a hundred years away.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS BIOGRAPHY OF (INAUDIBLE)

The geography of what, sir?

THE BIOGRAPHY (INAUDIBLE)

It's -- it's -- it's a minor work by an intelligent young lady who didn't know me at all and it's not a -- it's not a mean work. It's just not a -- I don't recognize myself in it but then I wouldn't. It -- as biographies go, I think it's -- I think it's a little small.

(QUESTION INAUDIBLE) HAVE YOU ANY INTENTION TO MAKE A MOVIE OF THAT?
I'm sorry. I don't have your question.

OF THAT (INAUDIBLE) THERE ARE MATERIAL FOR A NUMBER OF FILMS.
Yes, yes, sir.

HAVE YOU ANY INTEREST TO MAKE A MOVIE OF IT?
I would like -- I'm not ready for it. I would like very much to make a movie or a few movies of ANCIENT EVENINGS but I would have to be much more of a director before I do that. I'd have to learn -- you know, I wouldn't begin to know how to handle scenes that involve hundreds of people. I wouldn't even know where to find the right assistant directors at this point to -- to such scenes. You know, I'm -- I'm very modest about my capacity as a film director. I -- I look at certain films and I'm in awe. I feel like a high school athlete, you know, who's looking at -- at -- at great -- at what they call world-class stars, you know. There's so much to do in film that I haven't even approached so that I would hesitate to make that film now. Maybe in ten years if I'm still making films and know much more.

WHICH AMERICAN WRITERS DO YOU THINK ARE THE BEST AT THE MOMENT?
Of my generation?

YES.
Well, I -- let me answer it this way. I think if you asked a hundred people in America who study American literature they would probably name Bellow, Updike, Mailer, Styron, Vonnegut. I'd rather not speak of my personal preferences. Some of these people are my friends. Some I'm not so friendly with. I think it would be -- it would not really be of interest unless I had a deep literary opinion on it.

DO YOU HAVE ANY FEARS OR PHOBIAS AND DID YOU BURY THE HATCHET WITH GORE VIDAL?
Yeah, we buried the hatchet. We finally decided we were giving more pleasure to others than we were giving to ourselves (Laughter) with this feud so we -- Gore and I have always enjoyed each other's company. That was one of the ironies in the feud. When we get to -- we happened to meet in Moscow on that -- Gorbachev had that -- that whatever you call it. That conference last March so we spent a couple of days going around together and had fun.

1986?
1987?

WE HAVE A VERY LONG LIST BUT I AM TOLD THAT I MUST STOP RIGHT NOW. I AM REALLY SORRY THAT MANY PEOPLE ARE GOING TO BE DISAPPOINTED SO...
Well, maybe -- maybe five more minutes and quick questions. I'll try to quick answers.

ARE YOU MARRIED NOW? NO.
(Laughter).

WHERE DO YOU MAKE YOUR HOME AND WHAT IS THE FAVORITE PLACE YOU HAVE LIVED?
Well, my home is in Provincetown now. I live in Brooklyn also but -- but in Provincetown my home is -- is the house that you saw in the movie. Not furnished that way (Laughter). However, I would never make a movie in my own house but it wasn't really my house yet. If that is -- I had bought it with someone else I didn't get along with and finally bought out his half (Laughter) and we were going to divide the house because it was too large for me to afford but finally we just couldn't get along so we divided the house and I thought I've got to exorcise that fellow and I thought I'll bring in a movie crew. That will get rid of all the -- there's an example of my use of the occult (Laughter).

I FOUND YOUR THEORY ABOUT COMMUNISM VERY INTERESTING AND I AM WONDERING IF YOU HAVE HAD THOUGHTS WHY THE COUNTRIES THAT HAVE THE ANGLO-SAXON SYSTEM DON'T HAVE A MARXIST SYSTEM OR MARXIST PARTIES, BUT THE COUNTRIES THAT HAVE A CATHOLIC-LATIN ETHIC SEEM TO HAVE COMMUNIST PARTIES AND WHY ARE THE COUNTRIES THAT ARE CONTROLLED BY RUSSIA ALL HAVE (INAUDIBLE).
Well, I -- I can give you a quick superficial answer which is I think -- I think that one of the great ironies of modern history is -- is -- is that ultimately, I think, Catholicism and communism are very well suited to one another. What's always been wrong with Catholicism if you want to speak in superficial terms is that it relied too much on the ultimate judgment of God to alleviate the injustices of this world and obviously modern Catholicism is filled with revolutionary fervor now about having an egalitarian society as, indeed, why not if you have a deep belief in God then equality simply goes along with this more (inaudible) than wealth and poverty and so that I think ultimately it'll be a great marriage between -- maybe it'll take a hundred years but there will be a great marriage between communism and Catholicism and the WASP, as you put it, is terrified of both. After all, America has an old history of until the last forty or fifty years they were quite prejudiced against Catholics in this country and they were always seen as this certain sense they were seen as this danger. We speak of communism as a virus and perhaps something of that sort was in the American unconscious about the dangers of popery, as they used to call it.

HOW IMPORTANT IS MORTALITY OF YOUR SOUL TO YOU?
How important? Well, I think it used to be more important which has me slightly worried. Maybe I've, you know, maybe the ball game is over. I'd like to think (Laughter) it's very important but I don't like to think about it because it can get you awfully worried (Laughter).

THE LOS ANGELES TIMES HAS AN OUTSTANDING CARTOONIST NAMED CONRAD. A FEW MONTHS AGO HE HAD A CARTOON OF FOUR FRAMES -- COOLIDGE MESSED UP THE ECONOMY; THE SECOND FRAME HOOVER GOT BLAMED FOR IT; THE THIRD FRAME REAGAN MESSED UP THE ECONOMY; THE NEXT PRESIDENT WILL BE BLAMED FOR IT. WOULD YOU CARE TO COMMENT ON THAT?
I can only say I -- I'm in complete agreement. The Democrats have the world's worst luck so they'll probably get elected in

the 1988 just to reap all the benefits of Marie Antoinette (Laughter).

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT PROJECT? ARE YOU ADAPTING ANY OF YOUR BOOKS INTO SCREENPLAYS OR WHAT ARE YOU DOING PRESENTLY?
No, I'm working on a novel. I can't talk about. It's a large novel. I had done about 300 pages of it before I started the movie and I owe it to the publisher and I have a very good publisher who has supported me and has paid for this novel and the least they're entitled to, I think, is the novel so I'm going to work on that next and finish it and I haven't told anyone in America what it's about but since you're all the foreign press, if you promise not to tell any American reporters (Laughter) but don't ask me any more and I'll give you a very short answer and I won't say any more about it. This novel is about the CIA.

[redacted]

relied on technicians 1

occult 2-3

○ 2 film of TGDD: tragedy-farce-drama

⊕ 3-4 Godard slandered

4 - filming of 10 most interesting this year

5 - film as dream

7 feminism

9 immortal soul

⊛ 11 - writing - most of it is awful

11 directors as general

12-13 O'Neal cruel

15 wants to film AE

15 Vidal - saw him in Russia

16 Manso

17 novel is about CIA